

CA Fwd's testimony submission: Committee on Awards for Innovation for Higher Education

Corine Pekari [corine@cafwd.org]

Sent: Tuesday, September 16, 2014 9:01 AM
To: Innovation Awards (CA DOF)
Cc: Susan Lovenburg [susan@cafwd.org]
Attachments: Committee on Awards for In~1.pdf (269 KB)

Please see the attached copy of the testimony of James P. Mayer that will be presented by Susan Lovenburg at today's hearing.

Please confirm receipt and advise if an alternate format of this .pdf version is needed.

Regards,
Corine Pekari
Executive Liaison & Events Coordinator
CA FWD:
1107 9th Street, Suite 650
Sacramento, CA 95814
o: (916) 491-0022
d: (916) 244-1575
e: corine@cafwd.org

California Forward is a catalyst for a better Ca. To restore the California Dream, we must create more middle class jobs, promote cost effective public services and encourage accountability for results

@MoveCAFwd
@Caeconomy
[facebook.com/cafwd](https://www.facebook.com/cafwd)
[facebook.com/caeconomy](https://www.facebook.com/caeconomy)



Committee on Awards for Innovation in Higher Education

Comments by California Forward
Submitted by James P. Mayer, CEO
September 16, 2014

Committee members:

California Forward appreciates the work of this Committee and the opportunity to comment on the implementation of this ground-breaking program. California Forward (CA Fwd) supported the creation of the Awards for Innovation in Higher Education and is committed to helping the program be successful.

The Innovation Awards are alone an innovation. This an untested, but exciting initiative to stimulate better results than could be expected through traditional means of allocating state funds.

As such, CA Fwd's overarching comment is to urge the Committee to do what it can in the administration of this program to catalyze learning among all participants so as to improve higher education, as well as other critical public services that could benefit from innovation.

The specific target of increasing the number of bachelor's degrees is important. But the lessons from the Awards for Innovation in Higher Education also should inform the State's emerging role in supporting innovation in the full range of community and regional policies and programs, from community corrections to regional sustainability plans.

Ultimately, through the awards program, colleges and universities can accelerate learning for their students, among the institutions, and across the public sector.

CA Fwd is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to improving performance and accountability in government. CA Fwd has consistently worked to improve outcomes from public programs, and has specifically advocated for mechanisms and incentives that would enable local governments to adopt proven and promising practices that fit their circumstances. Given the State's size and diversity, CA Fwd has advocated moving beyond a paradigm of uniformity and a culture of compliance to a paradigm of innovation and a culture of excellence.

California has made significant strides in recent years – shifting authority and discretion over resources to K-12 school districts, as well as to county-based criminal justice and other community services.

But devolution alone is unlikely to result in the best possible outcomes. The State needs to establish a new role of defining desired statewide outcomes and facilitating – even accelerating – the learning among agencies at the community and regional level.

Toward that end, the Awards for Innovation in Higher Education appropriately establish clear objectives concerning the completion of bachelor's degrees, without dictating how those goals will be pursued. The program is seeking to reward – and thus encourage – colleges and universities that on their own initiative and with existing resources have made progress toward these goals. The Awards offer a one-time financial contribution with the expectation that the additional investments will be used to continue to improve results.

The application process encourages colleges and universities to identify how their innovations could be replicated or taken to scale. As a result, the Awards can be expected to increase the benefits of existing innovations, and encourage adaptation by other institutions.

To fulfill this potential, the Committee, in addition to making the best investments possible, also has the opportunity to encourage as much learning as possible – by the awardees as well as the other institutions willing to adapt the success. In considering this function, the Committee should give attention to the following:

- **Innovation often requires exceptional leadership; replication should not.** Detailed information should be gleaned from the projects to understand how existing policies frustrate or limit innovation. For innovations to catalyze system-wide benefits, policymakers must understand the systemic policy changes that are necessary, the consequences of inaction, and the benefits of reform to fiscal, regulatory and other rules that define the status quo.
- **Replicating innovation is about the “how” as much as the “what.”** Evaluations of successful pilot projects and even “best practices” often overlook the organizational, cultural and leadership factors that enabled the development and implementation of “the better way.” Change is predicated on behavior and not just policy. Documentation of the innovations should make it clear how those with authority, as well as stakeholders with influence, contributed to or frustrated improvement efforts.
- **Support a culture of learning.** Many innovations are discovered through failures. Breakthroughs, by definition, have overcome barriers. Yet most government agencies are risk-adverse, and “unsuccessful” experiments usually have consequences for the risk-takers. Candid assessments of these realities will help the public and policymakers understand the messy realities of change, and inform those who want to learn from someone’s failure as well as replicate someone’s success. In addition to student outcomes, it will be important to capture valuable learnings, regardless of the level of success.
- **Sustained improvement requires capacity, culture and champions.** The application process references some of these elements. To catalyze innovation elsewhere, participants need to carefully document the data systems, decision-making tools, communications, incentives, rewards and other elements that contributed to the success of a strategy or program.


- **Improving outcomes usually requires cooperation, collaboration or integration.** As with other policy areas, individual educational institutions are limited in their ability to control all of the factors associated with improving high-level outcomes. The Awards program encourages, but does not require collaboration among the sectors and institutions that will need to work together if at the macro scale California wants to move the needle fast enough and far enough on the target objective. While the Committee understandably wants to leave innovation to the innovators, it will be important to assess the costs and benefits associated with those institutions that go alone versus those that work together. This information is critical to driving system-wide changes to rules and incentives.

Improving the pipeline to a four-year degree will improve California's position in the global marketplace, as well as the potential for individual Californians to accomplish their personal goals.

Still, the Innovation Awards initiative has the potential to influence much more than the degree pipeline. It has the power to develop a new model for state leadership, new mechanisms for informing state policies, and a more beneficial relationship between state policymakers and public sector leaders working at the community and regional scales.

CA Fwd is prepared to support the Committee in fully realizing the opportunity presented by the Awards for Innovation in Higher Education. Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,



James P. Mayer
President/CEO